

Vigil for Andrzej Przewoźnik

The character of Maciej, the hero of Andrzej Wajda¹'s film, *Popiół i diament* ('Ashes and Diamonds') is reincarnated as Tadeusz in the director's later work, *Katyń*

. It is as if he wanted to show what happens to the 'doomed soldier' of the Home Army²

in his attempts to cope with his predicament, while keeping the gun and the principles which symbolise his will to fight on. If he only changes his name, but remains immovably true to his nature, the incoming Stalinist dictatorship will mercilessly eliminate him. Tadeusz, who symbolises the concept of freedom, meets his end on a cobbled street, just as Chopin's piano did when vengeful Cossack troops threw it from the upper floor of a Warsaw mansion during the January Uprising of 1863.

The Smolensk disaster turned Andrzej Przewoźnik into a fellow victim of Maciej and Tadeusz: their fates were shared in historic tragedies. It was a fate also shared with all those who Andrzej reburied with such reverence for human dignity in Kharkiv, Katyń, and Lwów – and in so many other places. The date and place of Andrzej Przewoźnik's birth is also symbolic of the debate surrounding this site. He saw the light of day on the compulsorily celebrated one hundredth anniversary of the January Uprising³ – in Palmiry, near Warsaw, according to certain encyclopaedias. It was in that village that between 1939 and 1941 the Nazis executed more than two thousand Polish intellectuals – with Stalin's agreement – with the aim of decapitating the Polish nation. According to family tradition, however, he was born in Jurków, near Tarnów, not far from Limanowa – where in December 1914 Hungarian hussars charging on foot held back a Russian attack which ultimately aimed to overrun the city of Kraków. Andrzej was seven years old at the time of the hunger protests on the coast. Waiting for Christmas in 1970, what could he have known of the shootings by the sea⁴, and of the slaughtered workers buried in secret at the shipyard? And of how some of the graves went 'missing' from the cemetery?

The workers' movement in Radom and Ursus and the ensuing series of trials and harsh sentences, the formation of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR)⁵, and later the film *Człowiek z marmuru* ('Man of Marble') must have been formative influences on the thirteen and fourteen year-old Kraków student. Towards the end of the 1970s he met an officer in the Home Army, Major Stanisław Dąbrowa-Kostka, and his brothers-in-arms. In that historic period when Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope, Andrzej – then a student at the College of Geology – heard suppressed truths of the past from heroes whose bearing embodied the spirit of the officers murdered in

Katyń. the Kraków apartment of Dąbrowa-Kostka was a living pantheon of the recent past. His companions not only met with him there, but with the memory of those murdered martyrs. The Major's life also hung by a thread in the spring of 1944: an officer and junior officer from a Hungarian technical unit saved him from the clutches of an SS unit carrying out reprisal operations. Thus Andrzej learnt of the expressions of Polish-Hungarian friendship during the war from the most reliable witness imaginable. By the time he took his school-leaving exam he already knew that he would concern himself with the Home Army, the Polish government-in-exile and the history of Polish-Hungarian relations during the war. His enrolment at the history department of the Jagiellonian university, however, was due to the sixteen months during which Solidarity was able to operate, and the period of martial law following it. This sparked the realisation that he could not only be a participant in history, but also a hero involved in forming it. In the years of stagnation following December 1981 Andrzej led a history discussion group. His invited guests – who included war veterans, as well as journalists removed from their jobs for their political convictions – inspired belief and hope in the students through their example, as if echoing in a secular context the words of Pope John Paul II: 'Have no fear!' Andrzej Przewoźnik initiated and organised our 1988 world convention for Polish World War II couriers, two participants of which were Wacław Felczak

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, the university lecturer and formerly imprisoned deputy commander of the Budapest courier base, and Jan Nowak-Jeziorański

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, Ronald Reagan's legendary advisor to the National Security Agency. The year 1988 was a turning-point for Andrzej in other ways also, because that was when he graduated and married his classmate, Jolanta. It then also became clear that Solidarity – which had been driven underground, and in which Andrzej was an active member – was becoming an unavoidable force; not only did the communist authorities have to take account of it, but they also had to negotiate with it.

The young historian had been preparing all his life for the task offered him in 1992 by the new environment created by the fall of communism. On 1 September, the third anniversary of the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, he was appointed the secretary-general of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites⁸. He restructured the organisation, which was set up in 1947, and gave new content to its work. One of his life's greatest achievements was the excavation of Katyń's mass graves – including those associated with Katyń at Kharkiv and Miednoje – and the subsequent creation of the cemetery. The restoration of the Cemetery of the Lwów Eaglets

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– devastated in the 1970s and designated a landfill site – was another of his major projects. In other words, in the early days of Ukraine's independence there was the need to restore the graveyard which was the final resting place of those who died heroes' deaths fighting to defend the town against the Ukrainians and Bolsheviks between 1918 and 1920. Andrzej Przewoźnik's success in these projects bears witness to his unparalleled negotiating and diplomatic skills, and to a line of reasoning which radiated empathy: the cemetery was opened in 2005. In addition to these, he restored hundreds of cemeteries, large and small, from Kazakhstan to Budapest and Wilhelmshaven, and from South Africa to Narvik in Norway. He wrote articles, forewords and essays, edited and financed publications, and commissioned memorial plaques,

statues and memorials. To prove how we have also been touched by his work, it should be enough to mention the memorial to Polish-Hungarian friendship in Győr, the Sobieski statue in Párkány

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(Štúrovo), the Felczak memorial plaque at the Eötvös College, and the recently unveiled Katyń memorial in Óbuda. He organised consultations and gave presentations at conferences. His list of posts is a page long, but behind every one was solid work. He also ceaselessly collected books and archive materials related to his planned works – including the history of Hungarian-Polish relations in World War II. He collected and classified enough files to fill many metres of shelving. For eighteen years he filled the post entrusted to him. He was waiting for the day when, having completed the long catalogue of tasks which filled his working life, he could sit down with peace of mind at his desk in the huge study he had planned and write, using the knowledge of the Hungarian language which he had acquired. He would write, for example of how in World War II Budapest became Poland's third capital city, and – without recourse to legends, but only using authentic source material – what the truth was with regard to Polish-Hungarian relations in the middle years of the twentieth century.

The saying that nobody is irreplaceable is contradicted by Andrzej Przewoźnik: he was irreplaceable.

¹ *Andrzej Wajda* (1926 –) – Polish film director, the most influential director in contemporary Polish cinema, and in Polish cinema as a whole over the past half century. (*As hes and Diamonds* – 1958, *Man of Marble* – 1977, *Katyń* – 2007)

² *The Home Army* (Armia Krajowa) – the army created at the beginning of 1942 from the unification of various underground military organisations under the leadership of the London-based Polish government-in-exile.

³ *The January Uprising* (1863-1864): Across the Polish territories under Russian rule, on 22th January 1963 an uprising broke out with the aim of restoring national independence. After crushing the freedom fight, the Russian authorities deported tens of thousands of Poles to the remote areas of Russia.

⁴ *The Seaside Shootings* – in December 1970 spontaneous demonstrations broke out on Poland's Baltic coast, because of the crackdown of the communist planned economy. Apart from the use of military and police force, the communist regime could only put off the demonstrations by the removal of Władysław Gomułka. At least forty protesters lost their lives, around one thousand were injured, and three thousand were arrested.

⁵ *The Workers' Defence Committee* (*Komitet Obrony Robotników – KOR*) – in June 1976 the communist government announced drastic price rises, news of which ignited demonstrations

and strikes in the Warsaw district of Ursus and in the city of Radom. In the autumn of 1976, in order to protect their rights, opposition intellectuals set up the Workers' Defence Committee.

⁶ *Wacław Felczak* (1916 – 1993) – historian, member of the Polish national resistance. From 1940 he served as a courier between the London-based government-in-exile and the underground organisations fighting against first the Nazis and then the Soviets. He was arrested in 1948, and released in 1956. Starting from 1958 he delivered researches on Hungary while working at the Jagiellonian University Institute of History in Kraków.

⁷ *Jan Nowak-Jeziorański* (1914 – 2005) – journalist, writer and politician. During World War II he was an envoy between the home-based resistance and the London-based Polish government-in-exile, and in 1944 he took part in the Warsaw Uprising. From 1945 onwards he lived in London, and between 1952 and 1976 he was the Director of the Polish Division of Radio Free Europe. Between 1976 and 1996 he was the leader of the Polish American Congress. He was a national security advisor to presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.

⁸ *The Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites* – an agency of the Polish government established in 1947 to take charge of national commemoration and to care for historic memorial sites. Andrzej Przewoźnik was director of the institution between 1992 and 2010.

⁹ *The Lwów Eaglets* – Polish students in the city of Lwów (Lviv in present-day Ukraine), who at the end of 1918 then throughout 1919 and into 1920, defended the city from the Ukrainians and the Bolshevik Red Army with support from units in the Polish army.

¹⁰ *Statue of Jan III Sobieski in Párkány* – in October 1683 near Párkány (Štúrovo in present-day Slovakia), allied forces led by the Polish king Jan III Sobieski dealt a bloody defeat to the Turkish armies retreating from Vienna. The town's Hungarian community initiated the raising of a statue to the memory of the battle and the heroic king, which was unveiled in 2008.

Katyń: On 17 September 1939 the Soviet Union attacked Poland from the rear. The attack took place after prior agreement between the Nazi and Soviet leaderships, and not only took members of the Polish armed forces prisoner, but carried out forced deportations on an unprecedented scale. Between the beginning of 1940 and June 1941 they deported at least one million Polish citizens. A large number of the victims were executed with Stalin's personal approval. The number of Poles murdered between March and June 1940 in the Katyń forest, Mednoye and Kharkov numbered around 22,000. A great number of those murdered were reserve officers – doctors, engineers, teachers and lawyers, and with their liquidation Stalin took the first step towards the elimination of Poland as a nation. In spring 1943 at one of the murder sites, the Germans discovered mass graves in the Katyń forest, in cooperation with their allies and medical delegations from neutral European countries. The Soviets denied their responsibility till 1990.

Smolensk: On April 10 2010, President of Poland Lech Kaczyński was travelling to Katyń with a high-level delegation in order to pay tribute to the memory of the victims on the seventieth

anniversary of the massacre. Not long before nine o'clock in the morning the presidential TU-154 plane crashed in the woods next to the runway at Smolensk. On board with the President there were high-ranking political and military leaders – all ninety-six people lost their lives. Russian and Polish investigators started analysing the causes of the tragedy, but the Polish investigation had not concluded by spring 2011, and the exact circumstances of the accident are still unknown.